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# **The Army Foreign Area Officer in Security Assistance**

**By**

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## **Introduction**

Military security assistance officers (SAOs) make up the majority of U.S. security assistance personnel stationed in embassies around the world. Almost every nation with which the U.S. has a security assistance relationship has a significant land force capability. Army foreign area officers (FAOs) occupy one third of available security assistance billets. In U.S. Southern Command, for example, FAOs comprise 100 percent of military group commanders and Army Section chiefs. This article seeks to help security assistance personnel better understand the Army FAO system.

The Army is the only service that has FAOs as a branch, rather than a secondary specialty. Not a basic branch, FAO is an assignments branch that lists field grade officers designated career management field 48, foreign area officer, and places those officer personnel against Joint and Army requisitions into attaché, political-military officer and SAO positions to best utilize their skills after successful service as a company grade officer (second lieutenant to captain) in a basic branch. Promotion to the rank of major from the basic branch is a prerequisite to FAO service.

Army foreign area officers are divided into nine regional areas of expertise based on regional studies and language skills. They are drawn from all branches of the Army. They have diverse backgrounds and capabilities that may be successfully matched to security assistance assignments.

All Army FAOs have service in a basic branch such as infantry, armor, quartermaster, ordnance or military intelligence. The foreign area officer candidates assess into the program through the functional area designation process between service years five and six. Officers who meet the qualifications are given an area of concentration in their seventh year of service. All officers career field designate at approximately the tenth year after their primary zone boards for the rank of major. Foreign area officer training is programmed by year group and typically begins between years eight and ten. Career field designation affects the future career progression of the officer after year ten.

The regional areas are listed as career management fields 48 B through J. Field 48B is Latin America, 48C is Western Europe, 48D is South Asian/Pacific, 48E is Eurasia, 48F is East Asian China, 48G is Middle East/North African, 48H is North Asia, Japan/Korea, 48I is Southeast Asia, and 48J is Africa.

Each FAO has language skills designated for their region, along with a master's degree in international affairs, regional studies, or a related discipline. As part of their qualification, most FAOs spend a year or more conducting in country training where they experience an immersion opportunity and regional orientation travel. Some language skills may be country-specific, such as Tagalog, or may have regional applications such as Russian, Chinese, French or Arabic.

Security assistance positions, attachés or political-military officers are three key FAO positions for officers desiring promotion to the rank of colonel. Two other positions are service school instructor and political-military staff officer. Many security assistance positions are coded

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for majors, allowing relatively junior FAOs to form a significant portion of the population. These junior FAOs must perform well in security assistance jobs if they desire promotion.

Army FAOs compete against other FAOs and Army acquisition corps officers, functional area 51, in the Operational Support career field for promotion. The different Army officer career fields are Operations, Operational Support, Institutional Support, and Information Operations.

Competition for, and in, security assistance jobs is keen. This promotion system, along with a management program that removes FAOs from the branch if they do not perform FAO duties ensures the security assistance community receives the best qualified officers. Foreign area officers in over-strength specialties are retrained and transferred at the needs of the Army and at the request of the individual FAO so long as the transfer from one region to another is from one that is over-strength to one that is under-strength.

### **How FAO Branch Matches FAOs to Security Assistance Jobs**

The quality cut for FAOs to be nominated to a security assistance position is identical to the nomination procedure for attachés or the Joint Staff. All FAO security assistance positions, with the exception of those on Army Staff, some component command positions and at the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM) are joint positions. First and foremost, the FAO must be fully qualified as a FAO with education, language training and in-country training complete. The FAO is then screened and nominated to the controlling command. This is the theater commander-in-chiefs and the unified command, or the Defense Intelligence Agency for attachés. In countries with smaller security assistance programs the FAO may perform both the security assistance and attaché mission and receive training for both jobs.

The unified commands specify the skills and specialized training for security assistance personnel, specifying training at DISAM for all security assistance personnel and the Individual Terrorism Awareness Course for personnel likely to deploy overseas. Foreign area officers that are majors or lieutenant colonels may receive additional joint professional military education, phase two, enroute to a security assistance assignment. Combat arms or logistics skills may be specified for a given position, with prior, or similar experience, required either by previous assignment or basic branch experience. These requirements become the joint manpower requisition forwarded to FAO assignments branch.

The foreign area officer assignments branch then checks individual officer files for the right match for the skills required, ensuring a match of capabilities to requirements. The ability to work independently, under pressure, is a personal quality frequently specified. Consistent high performance in related or previous assignments is also a filter. Screening also includes review of the FAO's official photo, microfiche and officer records brief for any factors that may render the officer less qualified to fill the billet. After successful nomination for the position, the officer is programmed for required training.

The Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management training typically consists of the Overseas Course and any of the following specialty blocks, Training Program Management, Training Management System and the Security Assistance Automated Resource Management Suite. Training beyond the core course is specified by the unified command, and may be added at the request of the student. There is also training on the Security Assistance Network to ensure worldwide connectivity for the security assistance community.

DISAM also provides an Executive Course for senior officers at the level of O-6 and above, along with tutorials for senior officers entering key security assistance positions, including SAO chiefs. DISAM welcomes command visits from unified command staff personnel and command

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sergeants major as these visits allow DISAM to familiarize key leaders with current issues in the security assistance community, leading to better utilization of FAO skills. Army FAO personnel assigned to specific slots may also attend specialty courses, such as the Training Officer Course at the request of their unified command.

## **Practical Applications**

The results of this selection and training process are basic branch experience, language skills, coupled with a thorough regional orientation and security assistance skills that are fused, to produce the new Army FAO. These skills are coordinated and used by the FAO in-country as not only a security assistance professional, but someone who is aware of the ramifications of those activities on a country and regional level. This provides the theater commander-in-chief (CINC) with an officer that works and integrates well within the country team and, more importantly to the commander-in-chief, one who can execute the full range of plans and programs from peacetime engagement and counternarcotics missions to facilitating reception, staging, onward movement and integration of personnel and equipment in support of large-scale contingency plans.

The SAO duties traditionally cover more than foreign military sales or international military education and training. SAO duties may involve designation by the Undersecretary of Defense (Policy) as the U.S. Defense Representative. The effective combination of knowledge and skills makes the FAO well suited to these positions as well as security assistance jobs.

There are many opportunities available to the Army FAO in security assistance. These range from a single individual in an austere, overseas location performing the role of both attaché and security assistance chief, to Army section chief jobs in the larger SAOs to a few instructor slots at DISAM. Additional examples of security assistance jobs include training officer, joint actions officer, joint operations officer and exercise officer. All of these positions require coordination with unified commands and military departments.

Frequently, the FAO in a security assistance job facilitates case management between the host country and the services by assisting the host country with tracking case activities and discrepancies. The FAO may also advise on the preparation and delivery of letters of request or facilitate payment to the DFAS on an existing account. Depending upon the level of expertise in the host country, and upon the “newness” of the security assistance program, the FAO may even assist with financial reconciliation, showing his counterpart how to read logistics requisitions and status, or the DD 645 (the bill). The vetting of foreign students remains a security assistance responsibility, along with tracking both students and U.S. origin defense equipment in the host country. The FAO assuming a security assistance job should have all current and historical files and suspense lists on hand. These files must cover all activities the FAO will control.

Army FAOs are highly encouraged to coordinate with the person they will replace. The primary issue is overlap time. Overlap on the ground is the best method of ensuring continuity in security assistance programs, and all services should do their best to facilitate this key handover of duties. As mentioned previously, each position may have additional duties other than those associated with security assistance. It is important that FAOs be proficient in security assistance duties before assuming additional responsibilities, as security assistance duties are their primary responsibilities. The FAO should integrate with the host country and country team as soon as practical.

Why is this important? In some countries, the security assistance presence is the only U.S. military presence or access to host country resources that the theater commander-in-chief possesses. The FAO/SAO must therefore be familiar with U.S. Army, host nation and joint

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doctrine. FAO knowledge of the operational art and doctrine facilitates the conduct and coordination of joint and combined operations with the host country and potential coalition partners. With their contacts and access to host country infrastructure and decision-makers, Army FAOs frequently become the go-to people for unified commands until further assets arrive in the host country in support of a contingency mission. As an example, in the aftermath of the attack on the USS COLE, an Army FAO obtained access to much-needed resources, including medical evacuation aircraft from a third country.

Along with the country team and the chief of mission, the SAO is a key player in facilitating military programs in any country. The SAO Chief also integrates the embassy's mission performance plan and the CINC's theater engagement plan. Together, the chief of mission and theater CINC recommend the size of the security assistance presence in any given country for Congressional approval. The bottom line is that the theater CINC specifies the special skills, personal qualities and training for security assistance positions and FAO Assignments Branch provides the Army officer best suited to perform the challenging job at hand.

### **About the Author**

Major Robert K. Holzhauer is currently assigned as the Director, Middle East Studies and Regional Operations Functional Coordinator for the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

Previous assignments include a tour in Germany as an artilleryman with assignments as a fire direction officer, a battalion task force fire support officer and as the headquarters battery executive officer. After transitioning to the military intelligence branch he served a tour with 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) as a special security officer, battalion military intelligence officer and military intelligence detachment commander. Since then, he has completed all the training to become a Foreign Area Officer, including a tour with the Office of Military Cooperation-Kuwait, where he attended the Kuwait Mubarak Al-Abdullah Joint Command and Staff College administered by the British Military Mission. Major Holzhauer reads and speaks French and Arabic.

Major Holzhauer was commissioned through the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps at the University of Colorado where he earned a bachelor's degree in political science. He has a master's degree in national security affairs, Middle East, North Africa, from the Naval Postgraduate School. He has a second master's degree in military science from the Kuwait Mubarak Al Abdullah Joint Command and Staff College/British Military Mission in Kuwait.